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SUBJECT: DISENGAGEMENT SITUATION REPORT, SEPTEMBER 12, 2005
(AS OF 1500 LOCAL TIME)

This is a joint message from Consulate General Jerusalem and Embassy Tel Aviv.

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Summary: As of 0900 local time September 12, all settlers and IDF personnel had departed the Gaza Strip. PA security forces took over Gaza settlement areas in stages before dawn September 12. Rafah crossing was closed in both directions by Israel, pending an agreement on border crossing arrangements, but the IDF no longer has a presence at the crossing and hundreds of Palestinians crossed Rafah on foot September 12. Egyptian border guards shot and killed one Palestinian and injured two others while dispersing crowds that overran the border crossing. Palestinian press quoted PA President Mahmud Abbas September 11 calling Gaza "a giant, open-air prison that remains occupied if Israel remains in control of the border crossings, particularly Rafah." The Israeli Cabinet voted September 11 to leave Gaza synagogues intact. Palestinian crowds entering Kfar Darom, Netzarim and Morag settlements set fire to synagogues there, according to UNRWA, late September 11. Palestinians also looted and burned some businesses in the Erez Crossing Industrial Zone. Unknown militants fired a Qassam rocket toward Sderot September 11 and another on September 12, but no injuries or damage resulted. Poll results released September 11 indicate that 84 percent of Palestinians see Israel's disengagement from Gaza as the result of Palestinian armed resistance, with 40 percent giving primary credit to Hamas. The poll also shows, however, strong preference for maintaining a ceasefire with Israel. End Summary.

12. (SBU) DISENGAGEMENT FROM SETTLEMENTS, CROSSINGS

Gaza Strip:

-- IDF Redeployment: According to Israeli media and UNRWA reports, Gaza IDF commander BG Aviv Kochavi departed the Gaza Strip at 0900 this morning through Kissufim crossing, the last Israeli to leave Gaza after remaining IDF units conducted a staged withdrawal on September 11. All settlers and Israeli civilian workers have already left Gaza.

-- PA Security Takeover: According to UNRWA, PA security forces took over Gaza settlement areas in stages, starting with Morag and ending with Elei Sinai and Dugit, before dawn September 12. Large crowds accompanied PA security forces to the settlement areas to celebrate Israel's withdrawal. Large groups of armed militants are also in the former settlement areas, according to UNRWA.

-- Rafah crossing: While Rafah crossing is officially closed in both directions by Israel, pending an agreement on border arrangements, the IDF no longer maintain a presence at Rafah. Palestinian media reported that hundreds of Palestinians and some Egyptians crossed both into Egypt and into Gaza on September 12. IDF South Command Liaison Major Singer reported that many Palestinians had crossed via Rafah into Egypt, but that 25 had been turned back. One "smuggler" had been killed by the Egyptians and two wounded, according to Major Singer. (Palestinian sources also claim that Egyptian border guards shot and killed a Palestinian man on September 12--see "Security Situation" below). Press reports quote Egyptian presidential spokesman Sulayman Awad as denying reports of a killing. Palestinian press quoted PA President Mahmud Abbas September 11 calling Gaza "a giant, open-air prison that remains occupied if Israel remains in control of the border crossings, particularly Rafah." USAID is looking into the possibility of providing technical support to facilitate opening of Rafah crossing.

-- Erez crossing is open to international/humanitarian traffic but closed to private Palestinian movement from Erez into Israel, according to UNRWA.

-- Erez Industrial Zone: Early on September 12, approximately 200 Palestinians entered the Erez Industrial zone and began looting businesses, according to Gaza businessmen and IDF contacts. Some buildings were set

ablaze. The few dozen PA security personnel at the scene could not handle the mob, according to an IDF officer. A Gaza businessman complained that the PA had not worked with the IDF to maintain security as the Israelis withdrew.

-- Philadelphia Corridor: The IDF completed withdrawal from the Philadelphia Corridor September 12, with 500 Egyptian border police beginning deployment there.

-- Synagogues/Structures: The Israeli Cabinet voted September 11 to leave Gaza synagogues intact, reversing course from previous plans to dismantle or demolish the synagogues. Palestinian crowds entering Kfar Darom, Netzarim and Morag settlements set fire to synagogues there, according to UNRWA, late September 11. PA Interior Minister spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khusa told Arabic-language media September 11 that the PA would demolish the synagogues and other public buildings if the IDF declined to do so, as buildings still standing have been gutted of their interior fixtures, and may have structural stability problems.

-- Greenhouses: At 0200 September 12, 1,500 Palestinian workers, now employed by the Palestinian Economic Development Company, entered the Gush Katif greenhouses to begin sowing the crop for the new planting season and to prevent looting or damage to the greenhouses.

West Bank:

-- While all settlers have departed or were removed from northern West Bank settlements Ganim, Kadim, Sa Nur and Homesh, the IDF remains in these areas, according to Israeli newspapers and PA security sources, and at the nearby Dotan IDF base. IDF sources told Israeli newspapers that redeployment from these areas will take place next week, and that the IDF will complete demolition of civilian/military structures when it departs.

13. (SBU) SECURITY SITUATION:

Gaza Strip:

-- Death/Injuries: According to PA security sources, Egyptian border guards shot and killed a Palestinian man and injured two others while dispersing crowds that overran the Rafah border crossing September 12.

-- Kidnapping: According to PA security sources, three Palestinian gunmen, reportedly belonging to al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and demanding an increase in government stipends, kidnapped an Italian journalist in Dir al-Balah September 10, but released him several hours later.

-- Injuries: The IDF shot and injured 11 Palestinians with rubber-coated bullets during stone-throwing clashes around the demolished Neve Dekalim settlement September 11, according to Palestinian newspapers.

-- Missile Attack: Palestinian militants fired an anti-armor missile toward an IDF outpost in northern Gaza September 11, according to PA security sources, but no injuries or damage resulted.

-- Qassams: Unknown militants fired a Qassam rocket toward Sderot September 11, and another September 12, according to an IDF spokesman, but no injuries or damage resulted.

-- Shooting: Unknown gunmen fired shots at the PA Interior Ministry's spokesman's office, but no injuries or damage resulted, according to PA security sources.

-- Violence: Al-Aqsa gunmen briefly took over PA Interior Ministry and Governorate offices September 10 in Khan Yunis and Dir al-Balah to demand jobs and salary payments, according to Palestinian newspapers.

West Bank:

-- Arrests: The IDF arrested two Palestinian women, separately, in Hebron and Tulkarm September 11 for allegedly planning attacks against IDF soldiers, according to Israeli newspapers.

-- Explosives: The IDF reported September 11 that it discovered two pipe bombs at the Huwwara checkpoint, near Nablus, during a routine walk-around inspection.

-- Confiscations: Palestinian newspapers reported September 12 that the IDF issued confiscation orders for 578 dunums (about 146 acres) of land south of Bethlehem for construction of the separation barrier.

14. (SBU) PALESTINIAN REACTIONS:

-- PA Prime Minister Ahmad Quraya' (currently in Saudi

Arabia) published an op-ed in Palestinian newspapers September 12 calling Israel's disengagement from Gaza the result of Palestinian steadfastness and popular resistance. He called for Palestinians, amidst their celebrations, and for the international community, not to lose sight of continuing Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank and actions undermining Jerusalem's status as the future Palestinian capitol.

-- Poll Results: According to a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (headed by Ramallah-based Khalil Shikaki) and released September 11, 84 percent of Palestinians see Israel's disengagement from Gaza as the result of Palestinian armed resistance. 40 percent give primary credit to Hamas for disengagement, while 21 percent assign credit to the PA and 11 percent credit Fatah. 77 percent of Palestinians support a ceasefire with Israel, however, with 62 percent opposing continued attacks against Israel from the Gaza Strip, and 60 percent supporting collection of arms from Gaza's armed factions. 74 percent of Palestinians polled said that they plan to vote in PLC elections (scheduled for January 2006), with 47 percent saying that they plan to vote for Fatah, 30 percent for Hamas, 11 percent for other groups, and 11 percent undecided.

-- Hamas Press Conference: Hamas spokesman Isma'il Haniyya held a press conference September 12 in which he called disengagement the result of steadfast Palestinian resistance to occupation. He called on Palestinians to celebrate Israel's withdrawal and to continue resistance to force Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and Jerusalem.
WALLES